



Balserak, J. (2017). The Renaissance impulses that drove Theodore Bibliander to Publish *Machumetis Saracenorum*. *Muslim World*, 107(4), 684-697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12216>

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The Renaissance Impulses that drove Theodore Bibliander to Publish *Machumetis Saracenorum*

Jon Balserak

If textual criticism did not begin with the Renaissance, it certainly reinvented itself during that era. This reinvention is usually associated with Lorenzo Valla and later Desiderius Erasmus for their work on the Greek New Testament, and rightly so. But a significant place must be reserved in that history for Theodor Buchmann, known more commonly by the surname, Bibliander.¹ Bibliander's text-critical contributions are numerous and include Hebrew and Greek works. He published an important Hebrew grammar, for instance, in 1535.² However, the area in which his work was most ground-breaking concerns Arabic texts, specifically his "encyclopedia of Islam"³ entitled, *Machumetis Saracenorum principis, eiusque successorum vitae, ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran*, in which he published the Qur'ān as well as a trove of associated documents.⁴ The most recent scholarship on Bibliander's *Machumetis Saracenorum* by Gregory Miller, asserts that:

Bibliander's interest in Islam was two-fold. He believed that the Turks were a real threat, both militarily and religiously. In this regard, he maintained that an accurate knowledge of Islam was the best weapon against it. But Bibliander also had a missionary motive.⁵

¹ On Bibliander, see Christine Christ-von Wedel, ed., *Theodor Bibliander (1505–1564): Ein. Thurgauerim gelehrten Zürichder Reformationszeit* (Zurich: Verlag Neue. Zürcher Zeitung, 2005); Emil Egli, *Analecta Reformatoria, II. Biographien. Bibliander, Ceporin, Bullinger* (Zurich: Zurcher und Furrer, 1901). For bibliographical information, see Christian Moser, *Theodor Bibliander, annotierte Bibliographie der gedruckten Werke* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2009). For an excellent treatment of the period, see Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

² Theodor Biblainder, *De optimo genere grammaticorum Hebraicorum* (Zurich: Hieronymus Curio, 1542).

³ Gregory Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis saracenorum principis eiusque successorum vitae, doctrina ac ipse alcoran* (1543) as the Sixteenth-century 'Encyclopedia' of Islam," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24/2 (2013): 241–54; esp. 243–45.

⁴ Theodor Bibliander, *Machumetis Sarracenorum principis vita ac doctrina omnis, quae & Ismahelitarum lex, & Alcoranum dicitur: ... Theodori Bibliandri, sacrarum literarum in Ecclesia Tigurina professoris, viri doctissimi pro Alcorani editione Apologia, multa eruditione & pietate referta, lectuque dignissima: quippe in qua multis ac validiss. argumentis & vitilitigatorum calumniis responde-tur, & quam non solum utilis, se & necessaria hoc praesertim seculo sit Alcorani editio* (Basel: Johannes Oporin and Nikolaus Brylinger, 1543).

⁵ Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis*, 242–43. See also, *inter alia*, Rudolf Pfister, 'Das Türkenbüchlein Theodor Biblianders', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 9 (1953) 438–54; Hartmut Bobzin, "Über

Similar ideas are also put forward in the analysis of Thomas Burman.⁶

Miller elaborates on both points (defending and evangelizing) in other portions of his article. But he also ventures into more complex and arguably controversial matters. He comments on Bibliander's assertions of the satanic character of the Qur'ān. He also discusses Bibliander's toning down of the medieval marginalia and other notes which the Swiss theologian and humanist provided on the text of the Qur'ān. "This," Miller remarks concerning Bibliander's softening of the marginalia and notes, "highlights the ambivalent, multivalent, even self-contradictory nature of Bibliander's encyclopedia as a whole."⁷ Yet despite this acknowledgment, Miller sticks with his delineating of this two-fold purpose according to which Bibliander published his *Machumetis Saracenorum*.

In what follows, I will query whether this analysis of Bibliander's aims is correct. A short article such as this one is invariably going to leave a variety of concerns undiscussed. What appears below cannot really represent anything more than a brief reflection on Bibliander's work and the intentions he had for it. Nevertheless, in these brief reflections I will argue that we are almost certainly wrong to believe Bibliander published his text with the specific aims of instructing Christian scholars for evangelizing and defending Christendom against the Turks. Bibliander was not only a humanist but an acquaintance of Erasmus, the (so-called) Prince of the humanists.⁸ It is well-known that Erasmus published a wide variety of things for various reasons, often without a particular interest or concern for self-contradiction. He published because that is what humanists were interested in doing. This, I will argue below, is the most likely explanation for why Bibliander published, though I will note the existence of another possible explanation as well.

Christianity and non-Christian Religions

Theodor Bibliander Arbeit am Koran (1542/43)" in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 186 (1986): 347-63; and Bruce Gordon, "Theodor Buchmann," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 7 vols, Western Europe 1500-1600 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 6: 643-53, and the literature cited below.

⁶ Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 110-121, specifically 112.

⁷ Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis*, 248.

⁸ For the relationship of Erasmus with the Zurich reformers like Bibliander, see, Christine Christ-von Wedel, "Erasmus und die Zürcher Reformatoren Huldrych Zwingli, Leo Jud, Konrad Pellikan, Heinrich Bullinger und Theodor Bibliander," in eds. Christine Christ-von Wedel and Urs B. Leu, *Erasmus in Zürich: Ein verschwiegene Autorität* (Zurich: TVZ, 2008), 77-165.

How did sixteenth-century European Christians view Islam? The question does not have a simple answer. A comparison with Judaism might be a helpful way to commence. Regarding Judaism, medieval European Christianity adhered, though not without significant lapses, to Augustine's "Doctrine of Witness." Augustine's doctrine argues essentially that the continued presence or existence of the Jewish people was a good thing. It was desirable because the Jews themselves provided testimony to the truthfulness of the Christian religion. The Jews possessed the sacred scriptures which demonstrated that they had not been invented by the Christian community as a means of supporting their claim that Jesus' coming to earth had been prophesied. Furthermore, the existence of a subjugated Jewish nation demonstrated that they were being punished for their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, sent to them by God. It was, thus contended that the continued existence of the Jews within Christian society was a good thing, so long, of course, as they remained in their second-class status. In this way, the doctrine actually facilitated an anti-Jewish program during the Middle Ages which ensured the continuance of Augustine's doctrine⁹

The idea that Islam could be understood after a similar fashion would seem surprising. The "Turks", as they were generally identified at this time, were a Muslim empire that began in the thirteenth century. They made major gains in the fifteenth century, including the 1453 conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed the Conqueror and his armies. With the siege of Vienna in 1529, they were knocking loudly on the door of western Europe. Before this they had taken possession of the Balkans and North Africa. Suleiman the Magnificent, whose reign began in 1520, was not infrequently the focus of European fears.

Though perhaps surprising at first glance, it appears that important portions of medieval canon law came to view Islam in the same manner that it viewed Judaism.¹⁰ Medieval canon lawyers, working with the broad category of otherness handed down from the early church, began to treat all non-Christians as essentially the same. Thus, canon lawyers began to argue that both Jews and "Turks" were

⁹ See *inter alia* Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 18.46 in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, ed. Emanuel Hoffman (Vindobonae: Holder - Pichler - Tempsky, 1899-90), 48:644-45 and *Contra Faustum* 12.12-13 in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, ed. Joseph Zycha (Vindobonae: Holder - Pichler - Tempsky, 1891), 31:341-42.

¹⁰ Emanuele Colombo, "Western Theologies and Islam in the Early Modern World" in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800*, eds. Ulrich Lehner, Richard Muller, and A.G. Roeber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 482-483.

“the interchangeable constituent parts of the broader category ‘infidelity’.”¹¹ Moving forward from the Middle Ages, this conception may be reflected in someone like John Calvin, who could regularly refer to the unholy trinity of “the Jew, the Turk, and the Papist.”¹² Calvin’s inclusion of the Papists within this trio of godless enemies reminds us that there were many blameworthy groupings within sixteenth-century thought. The world into which Bibliander’s work was sent represented something of a congested playing field, with Protestants (Lutherans, Calvinists, etc), Papists, Pagans, Anabaptists, Radicals, Hussites, Waldensians, among others all vying for a place.

The problems raised by the Reformation meant that Christendom itself was divided. Roman Catholics viewed not only Judaism and Islam as heretical but also all the various forms of Protestantism. Likewise, Lutherans, the Reformed, Anabaptists, and other evangelicals who are broadly categorized today as Protestants believed similarly about the Roman church. This was, of course, the beginning of the hemorrhaging of Christendom in the Latin West, which would continue for centuries and is, in some senses, continuing until the present day. Thus, attacking the Roman Church introduced enormous questions.¹³

Adding further to the confusion over orthodoxy were the views of major Renaissance and Reformation-era thinkers, such as Erasmus and Zwingli, both of whom contemplated the idea that virtuous “pagans” would be among those who made it to heaven.¹⁴ Although not common, the fact that these views were adhered

¹¹ Stefan Stantchev, “‘Apply to Muslims What Was Said of the Jews’: Popes and Canonists Between a Taxonomy of Otherness and Infidelitas” in *Law and History Review* 32 (1): 65-96; esp. 96. I am indebted for knowledge of this article to Colombo, “Western Theologies,” 482. Stantchev’s essay interacts with an enormous amount of primary and secondary literature, to which I refer the interested reader.

¹² See for instance Calvin’s sermon on Deuteronomy 13: 1 (CO 26: 261).

¹³ One can see this collection of intellectual and spiritual problems not only in the works of radicals and Anabaptists individuals, but also even in ordinary French Christians who complained that they had been left by Guillaume Farel, Calvin, and Beza with a complete lack of clarity about how they ought to understand the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin, for instance, when addressing the Catholic Church can speak in two different ways. He can say, particularly in sermons, that Rome is simply not a church. (e.g. his sermon on Acts 2: 41–2, SC 8: 43). But he can also distinguish between senses of the idea of church. So, he explains in *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 4.2.12 that there is one way in which it is acceptable to call the Roman Catholic fellowship a church. “I call them churches, in that the Lord wondrously preserves some remnant of his people there, though miserably torn and scattered.” (CO 1: 557). This kind of nuance seems to have been confusing to ordinary believers, who saw it as equivocation. For more, see Jon Balserak, *Establishing the Remnant Church in France; Calvin’s Lectures on the Minor Prophets, 1556-1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 19-52.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Erasmus in a letter to Cornelis Gerard, see Mynors, R.A.B., and D.F.S. Thomson (transl.), *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974-) I: Letters 1 to 141, p. 31.

to by such important intellectuals testified to the degree to which Europe was undergoing profound change.

The Rise of the Turks and Europe's Sins: a Scourge of God

As Bibliander began his life, he would arguably have never known a time when the Ottoman Empire was not a concern to him and his neighbors. Born in Thurgau, around 1505, Buchmann (Bibliander) studied Greek and Hebrew under Oswald Myconius while living in Zurich. He moved to Basel in 1526 where he was taught by Konrad Pellikan and Johannes Oecolampadius. After a stint as a schoolmaster in Poland, he returned to Zurich. He was an accomplished Hebraist and became a public lecturer on the Old Testament, providing weekly lectures in Latin to a wide range of the population in Zurich. He remained in this position for thirty years. Together with Konrad Pellikan, Bibliander played a major role in the completion of the 1543 *Biblia sacrosancta*.¹⁵

In 1517, the Ottomans took control of Jerusalem and Cairo. Suleiman the Magnificent captured Belgrade in 1521. Young Theodor would have been in his early teenage years during this time. The Turks were a relative novelty to Europe, their relationship with Europe and Europeans multi-leveled. Beyond the obvious fear the Turks elicited, there were rumors that some had colluded with them to ensure that the Turks had easy movement westward in exchange for favours or to further their own political or economic ambitions. But the overriding sensibility of Europeans towards the Turks was undoubtedly fear.

Contributing significantly to this sense of threat was the eschatological fear the Turks evoked. They were believed by many to have been predicted in the Old Testament prophecies, as an anti-Christ who would bring devastation. They were, theologians insisted, predicted in Ezekiel 38-39. The Turks were Gog and Magog. Luther, for instance, published his own translation of Ezekiel 38 and 39 as a separate booklet. In his introduction to this booklet, he made the connection explicit, declaring (to provide one example) that the Holy Spirit “calls the Turk not

¹⁵ This paragraph is a synopsis of the life of Bibliander found in Gordon, “Theodor Buchmann,” 6: 643-44. On the Zurich bible, see, *Biblia sacrosancta: ad Hebraicam veritatem & probatissimorum ac manuscriptorum exemplarium fidem diligentissimè recognita, & restituta* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1543). For a recent text on early bibles, see *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation. Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, eds Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

inaccurately Magog.”¹⁶ Other biblical commentators, such as Philip Melanchthon and Nicolas Senecker, also argued that the Turks were represented in prophecy by the little horn of the beast in Daniel 7.¹⁷ Hence, the approach of the Turks was understood as far more than a potential political and militaristic contest, but a spiritual one as well.

The other significant event occurring in 1517 was Luther’s posting of the 95 theses. One year later, Luther mentioned the Turks in his “Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses.” In relation to the fifth thesis, Luther articulates a theological perspective on the Turkish threat to which he adhered for essentially the rest of his life. In a section “discussing ‘punishment,’ that is ‘God’s correction and scourging,’ Luther asserts that, as with the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6–10), only repentance can still God’s chastising rod.”¹⁸ In his comments, Luther complained that the Pope would stoke aspirations for a crusade against the Turks. It is within this context that Luther’s position was summarized by Pope Leo X in *Exsurge Domine*: “To go to war against the Turks is to resist God who punishes our iniquities through them.”¹⁹

Luther revisited his views in 1529. In fact, one of the reasons he wanted to write *Vom Kriege wider die Türken* [On War against the Turk]²⁰ was to revisit and defend his earlier statements. In this document, Luther used similar language, describing the Turk as the rod of God’s wrath and explaining that God was using the Turks to punish the world. Luther explained that his assertion (i.e. concerning fighting the Turk being equivalent to fighting against God) would still be true if it were a holy war that was being fought by the Roman church against the Turk. In fact, Luther’s aim in writing *On War against the Turk* was very much to stop a holy war, though he did believe the Emperor Charles V should lead a war against the Turks as a means of protecting his subjects. Luther believed that this was the task of civil government, not the church. Thus, one of his chief aims was to argue

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Vorrede zu Ezechiel 38-39* in WA 30 II: 220-236, 223; the introduction runs 223-226. For more, see Mark U. Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531-46* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 97-114.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Irena Backus, “The Beast: Interpretations of Daniel 7.2-9 and Apocalypse 13.1-4, 11-12 in Lutheran, Zwinglian and Calvinist Circles in the Late Sixteenth Century” in *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 3/1 (2000): 59-77.

¹⁸ Robert Smith, “Prophecy, the Pope, and the Turk: Luther’s Pastoral Apocalyptic”, in *On the Apocalyptic and Human Agency: Conversations with Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther*, eds. Kirsj Stjerna and Deanna A. Thompson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 7-19, see 8.

¹⁹ This statement, from *Exsurge Domine*, is number thirty-four in a forty-one point summary of errors taught by Luther. It is not a quote from Luther but a precis of one of the points he asserted.

²⁰ WA 30 II: 81-148; LW 46:155–206.

against a military conflict in which the church was involved. Luther felt moved to call leaders to do their job in encouraging their subjects “to repentance and prayer.” We have, he said, “earned God’s wrath and disfavor, so that he justly gives us into the hands of the devil and the Turk.”²¹ In 1530 Luther also published *Heerpredigt wider den Türken* [Military Sermon against the Turks],²² which he seems to have published because no one had listened to *On War Against the Turk* and, although in the meantime the Turks had withdrawn, he still regarded them as a serious threat. Again apocalyptic imagery fueled his thought.

Thus, the Turks were deemed by Luther, and indeed much of Europe, as not merely a military threat but as the scourge of God sent as a punishment for sins. It seems that Europe’s attitude, at least portions of Europe, were concerned about the Turk in a manner that extended beyond academic and legal conceptions of Islam as a religion.

The Renaissance and Bibliander’s Publishing of his *Machumetis Saracenorum*

Bibliander published *Machumetis Saracenorum principis, eiusque successorum vitae, ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran* in 1543. Other sacred texts were being printed at this time as well. Erasmus’ *Novum Instrumentum omne* was published in 1516, the *Mikraot Gedolot*, a rabbinic Bible funded by Daniel Bomberg, in 1516-17, and the Complutensian Old Testament in 1517. William Tyndale’s English New Testament was published in Worms in 1526, and the Roman Catholic humanist, Hebraist and theologian Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter’s *Mahometis Abdallae filii theologia dialogo explicata, ... Alcorani epitome ...* appeared in 1543—the same year as Bibliander’s text.

As has been argued, Bibliander’s aims for publishing his *Machumetis Saracenorum* would appear *prima facie* to include evangelism and combatting heresy. To be sure, evidence for both of these motives can be found in this massive document. Christian attitudes towards Islam at this time were diverse but did include the belief among some that the Turks could be evangelized. Thus, despite the fear that gripped Europe regarding the threat of Islam, some were of the opinion that the church existed to spread the Gospel and that this must include spreading the Christian faith into lands controlled by the Turk. Many of these individuals were of the opinion that literature about Islam should be published

²¹ LW 46:170-71.

²² WA 30 II: 160-197.

precisely for this reason. That being said, one can feel the tension that was (as we shall see momentarily) experienced in Europe concerning this belief. An eschatological force and threat, if you will, was advancing on Europe. Who, one might legitimately query, could possibly think it would be a good idea to publish documents related to this threat? Surely, it might be surmised, the only thing that ought to be sought is the extermination of all traces of this threat.

Such feelings are somewhat reminiscent of the Reuchlin affair. In 1510, Johannes Reuchlin was asked for his legal opinion on the status of Jewish books. This occurred within the context of Johannes Pfefferkorn, a Jewish convert to Christianity, accusing individuals of possessing literature, namely Jewish literature, which defamed Christianity. Pfefferkorn had convinced the emperor to order the confiscation of all books owned by Jews. Reuchlin then defended the right of individuals to own Jewish literature. Reuchlin was a humanist and accomplished Hebraist, and an individual who believed in and supported the usefulness of Jewish practices, such as Kabbalah. As a result of his support for such literature, Reuchlin was accused of heresy. The incident blew up into a near-Europe-wide debate about whether Jewish literature and Christian Hebraism had any place at all in European society or whether it ought to be banned entirely and all extent literature burned (barring of course the Old Testament). It also prompted a critical debate on humanism and its relationship to Christian theology. The incident cost Reuchlin an enormous amount of money in legal fees, but it also brought him support from across Europe. This support included the publication of the famous *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* published anonymously in 1515.²³

A similar series of events occurred during Bibliander's attempts to publish his work on Islam. The folio edition of *Machumetis Saracenorum* was published by Bibliander's friend, Johannes Oporinus, in Basel in 1543. But the project was the subject of immense criticism. The censors of Basel's printing houses objected to it. In fact, the copies of the printed work were seized and Johannes Oporinus imprisoned briefly. Their central objection was that *Machumetis Saracenorum* contained a translation of the Qur'ān into Latin, which was viewed as too incendiary to be permitted. Bibliander however was able to go forward with publication of the work after leading reformers, such as Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon interceded on Bibliander's behalf. With this support the Basel magistrates allowed the work to be published.

²³ *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* (Hagenau, 1515). It was published anonymously, and also appeared in 1517 from a Basel printing press.

A perceptive review of the content of Bibliander's *Machumetis Saracenorum* should, it seems reasonable to say, have alerted the objectors to its value, but the experience of fellow humanist Reuchlin a generation earlier provides a window into the tensions in existence at the time. Indeed the experience also reminds one of the criticism Erasmus endured for changing *verbum* (*In principio erat verbum*) to *sermo* (*In principio erat sermo*) in his translation of John 1: 1.

In the case of the *Machumetis Saracenorum*, it consists of three books bound together, running to over 600 folio pages. Oporinus printed the text in double columns with extensive marginal notes. The first book presents the Latin translation of the Qur'ān produced by Robert of Ketton. "Bibliander's printed version of the Latin Qur'ān was in no sense a complete critical edition," given his editorial decisions and adjustments.²⁴ Bibliander includes in this volume, along with the text, writings from medieval and contemporary and near-contemporary authors. Philip Melanchthon and, in some editions Martin Luther, provided prefaces, as does Peter the Venerable of Cluny and Bibliander himself. The second book consists of theological texts by individuals like Nicholas of Cusa's *Cribrationum Alcorani Libri tres*, Ludovico Vives' *Veritate fidei Christianae decerpta*, Raffaele Maffei's *De Mahometo eiusque legibus, & Saracenorum rebus, ex Volaterrano*, Savanarola's *Mahumetanorum sectam omni ratione carere ...*, and Riccoldo da Monte di Croce's *Confutatio*. The third volume contains a history of the Saracens. Thus, Bibliander published the Qur'ān within a mass of writings, some of which were particularly critical of the Islamic faith while others less so.

As to the possibility that Bibliander wished the massive document to serve as an aid in evangelism, we should note that the view commonly held of Islam by Christian theologians during the sixteenth century was that it was "an artificial and purely human construct, a mish-mash of Judaism, Christianity, and some other elements."²⁵ This was also the conception as set out by Luther, Melanchthon, and Bibliander. That being said, it is important to consider two points related to the broader European view of the character of Islam.

The first point is that elements of European intellectual society believed that converting Muslims was impossible and, in fact, it was useless even to try. This was an expression of a kind of toleration that was exhibited towards Muslims by Christians who lived among them, such as *Colloquium heptaplomeres*, supposedly

²⁴ Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, 114; also Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation. Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (Berlin: Ergon, 1995), 230-31.

²⁵ Colombo, "Western Theologies," 485.

authored by Jean Bodin.²⁶ Yet, be that as it may, these works may have been written for purposes of evangelization, which had been a concern of the Christian church for centuries. As far back as Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles*, also known by the title *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium*, theologians were writing to aid missionaries in explaining the Christian religion to, and defending it against, dissenting points of doctrine in Islam and Judaism. Of course, these efforts were being pursued simultaneously with the crusades.

The second point related to European views of Islam is that for some Christian theologians, Muslims were regarded as in a certain sense, innocent; that is to say, they were defined as pagans in that they were counted genuinely ignorant of the truths of the Bible. They, therefore, could not be held guilty for not believing them. This did not translate into a belief that they should not be evangelized, but rather it influenced thinking on methods of evangelism associated with accommodation and working to make the most of shared beliefs, such as monotheism.²⁷

Now, concerning evangelism, there was in the Early Modern period increased zeal to spread the Gospel to Muslims, among the Capuchins, Jesuits, and Discalced Carmelites who moved to the Middle East. Attempts to convert slaves followed the forced expulsion of the *moriscos* from 1604 to 1614.²⁸ These aspirations led to the publication of missionary-oriented literature that described the Middle East for missionaries, as well as the inclusion of catechisms aimed at instructing Muslims. One might wish to place Bibliander's *Machumetis Saracenorum* within this broadly conceived collection of literature, though I will argue that this was not its primary purpose.

The Early Modern era also witnessed changing attitudes towards other religions, such as Judaism. Martin Luther's early works on the Jews, for instance, were gentle and conveyed a kind of compassion towards them. But very different winds were blowing from Wittenberg towards the Jewish people by the early 1540s. In point of fact, the vehemence Luther reserves for the Jews in *Von den Jüden und iren Lügen* [On the Jews and the Lies],²⁹ in which he sets out his well-known seven steps for dealing with the Jewish people, which include burning their homes and synagogues, bears little resemblance to his general attitude towards the Turks in

²⁶ Colombo, "Western Theologies," 487. See Mercedes García-Arenal, "Religious Dissent and Minorities: The Morsco Age," in *The Journal of Modern History* 81: 888-920.

²⁷ The material in this paragraph is a summary of Colombo, "Western Theologies," 487.

²⁸ Colombo, "Western Theologies," 487.

²⁹ WA 53: 412-552.

On War Against the Turks. So Christian attitudes towards non-Christian religions were, it seems reasonable to argue, fluctuating during this time.

The year 1543 actually saw the publication of both Luther's *Von den Jüden und iren Lügen* and Bibliander's *Machumetis Saracenorum*. The two are profoundly different and yet not wholly dissimilar. Both condemn the two religions in unequivocal terms. In the preface by Melanchthon to Bibliander's tome, entitled *praemonitio*, that is a "warning," to the reader, he declares: "You see therefore pious reader, the errors and kingdom of Mohammed are condemned by the clear word of God."³⁰ Indeed, the title page alone states in the clearest possible terms that Islam is a devilish heresy. Yet in Bibliander's work, as opposed to Luther's *Von den Jüden*, efforts are made to explore points of contact. Again in his *praemonitio*, Melanchthon (though he had just condemned Islam) notes the existence of sound qualities in the Qur'ān, and contends that Islam is a religion informed by natural law and contains some elements which are found in Christianity. Likewise, in Bibliander's note to the reader at the beginning of volume one of *Machumetis Saracenorum*, he quotes 1 Timothy 2: 4, "God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth."³¹—by which Bibliander seems to have implied that God desires even Muslims to be saved (a conclusion that is difficult to cull from Luther's *Von den Jüden*).

Thus, evidence can be found which would *appear* to support Miller's contention that Bibliander published *Machumetis Saracenorum* to instruct Christians in evangelism and the combatting of Islam. Moreover, one might argue that the addition of two works found in the 1550 edition of *Machumetis Saracenorum* might add weight to this reading. He added Christoph Richer's *De rebus Turcarum*, and the extremely popular *Türkenbüchlein* (that is, a pamphlet about the Turks; these were popular German pamphlets that described the Turk and ordinarily elucidated warnings about the danger they represented to Europe) of Bartholomew Georgijevitz, which significantly altered the previous edition. As Gordon notes, both of these works would have added to the polemical nature of the work as a whole.³² They also, Gordon rightly comments, contributed to the scholarship of the work, since Richer had been an ambassador in Constantinople, and his work was saturated with detailed knowledge of Turkish culture.³³

³⁰ "Vides igitur pie lector, clara uoce Dei damnatos esse Mahometi errores ac regnum." Philipp Melanchthon, "Philippi Melanchthonis Praemonitio ad Lectorem," *Machumetis Saracenorum*.

³¹ Bibliander, "Christiano Lectori Theodorus Bibliander S," *Machumetis Saracenorum*.

³² Gordon, "Theodor Buchmann," 6: 652-53.

³³ Gordon, "Theodor Buchmann," 6: 652-53.

Bibliander's extensive preface, "Apologia pro editione Alcorani" could also be used to demonstrate both of the aims he is supposed to have had for publishing *Machumetis Saracenorum*. In it, Bibliander provides powerful arguments for why Christians should be familiar with the contents of the Qur'ān. He treats Islam as a heresy, associating it with Nestorianism. Bibliander ransacks history and Christian writings to do this, discussing material from Augustine, Tertullian, Chrysostom, and other of the fathers, and detailing the qualities of numerous heresies from Marcion to Valentinians, Ebionites, and Manicheanism and also other concerns from the superstitions of the Babylonians to the reign of the Anabaptists in Münster. In this preface, he also aligns the Turks with the Antichrist. Yet he also speaks, as I have said, of the need to convey the Gospel to the world.

But though the content of Bibliander's *Machumetis Saracenorum* would appear to testify to the twin purposes of evangelism and the combatting of heresy, I argue that there are other qualities found in the volumes which raise questions about such a reading. To give one example, Bibliander's removes the marginal notes contained already in the *Collectio* and replaces them with his own notes, which were more moderate, more descriptive, scholarly, and un-polemical in character. This editorial decision hints at the idea that there is greater complexity to Bibliander's aims; that his aims were almost certainly not to train Christian scholars in evangelism and the defense of Christendom against the Turks. I shall now move on to provide further argumentation for this.

Bibliander and the Turk as the Scourge of God

Let us return to the belief articulated by Luther concerning the Turk as the scourge of God. This view was commonly held not only in Germany but also throughout the European Continent and the British Isles. It was not only held in the 1520s but throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. And in point of fact, one of the forces shaping these attitudes was Theodor Bibliander himself. In addition to *Machumetis Saracenorum*, Bibliander published *Ad nominis Christiani socios consultatio, qua nam ratione Turcarum dira potentia repelli possit ac debeat a populo Christiano* a year earlier, in 1542. This was translated into English the same year.³⁴ *Ad nominis* had a marked impact throughout Europe and conveyed the message that the Turks were a scourge sent from God to punish Christians for their sins.

³⁴ Bibliander, *Ad nominis Christiani socios consultatio, ... a populo Christiano* (Basel: Nicolaus Brylinger, 1542); cf. Pfister, 'Das Türkenbüchlein Theodor Biblianders', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 9 (1953) 438-54.

Now, before taking up Bibliander's *Ad nominis* further we should note that there were disputes about precisely whose sins God wished to punish by means of the rise of the Turks. Bibliander and his colleagues were concerned about a Europe which had embraced Roman Catholicism. Bibliander believed this, namely Romanist idolatry and false doctrines (veneration of the saints, oracular confession, etc), was to blame. Roman Catholics interpreted matters differently. In fact, the rise of Luther's "heresy" was identified by some Roman Catholics as the *secta Mahumetica*.³⁵ One of those Catholics was the aforementioned Widmanstetter, who published his *Mahometis ... theologia; Compendium Alcorani; Epitome Alcorani*, also in 1543. Scholars like Bobzin have argued that Widmanstetter published this not only with the Turks in mind but also to show "affinities between the new 'heresy' of the Lutherans and the old one of the 'Mahometistae'."³⁶ We will return to this point later.

Bibliander was persuaded that God's anger had moved him to raise up the Turkish menace for the aims of punishing his own people. *Ad nominis* runs through various themes but the clarity of Bibliander's views on this specific subject are beyond dispute. Quoting from the 1542 English translation, Bibliander insisted that,

It is not the crueltye and tyranye of the Turkes that fyghteth agayuste vs: but the wrath of god from aboue is sore kyndeled and waxeth cruell vpon vs by a cruell people.³⁷

Continuing, Bibliander stressed again that people must not misunderstand the threat the Turks pose. It is God, he insisted, who is attacking in the person of the Turk.

The Turkes brynge not in warres vpon vs so that ower garisons of men and coucell may not turne them awaye: but god the Lorde of powers and the

³⁵ See, C. A. Patrides, "'The Bloody and Cruell Turke:' The Background of a Renaissance Commonplace" in *Studies in the Renaissance* 10 (1963): 126-135, 132 n. 34.

³⁶ Ulisse Cecini, "Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter" in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 7 vols, Western Europe 1500-1600 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 7: 235-245, especially 242 referencing Bobzin, *Der Koran*, 7.

³⁷ Bibliander, *A Godly consultation vnto the brethren and companyons of the Christen religyon. By what meanes the cruell power of the Turkes both may and ought for to be repelled of the Christen people* (London: John Mayler for John Gough, 1542), fol 117r-v. as cited in Patrides, "The Bloody and Cruell Turke," p. 133 n.36.

maker and gowernoure of heauen and erth fyghteth agaynste vs. the hand of god / the plages of god are strycken into vs.³⁸

Bibliander continued this theme, noting that Suleiman the Magnificent is the whip with which the holy and righteous Lord beats and scourges “us;” he is the razor with which the Lord pares “us;” the sword by which he will slay “us.”³⁹

Bibliander then considered the hopes and aspirations of his contemporaries. Might they hope, he inquired, for this divine visitation to end via military conquest by the armies of the Emperor Charles V on behalf of Europe? Bibliander argued that it would be wicked to hope for this.

And to hope for an ende of those plages beinge indued with soche euyl maners / soche peruersyte / and soche hardenes of mynde as can not repent: the nature or disposition of god / the thretenyn|ges of god the warkes of god / and the examples of all tymes doth so greatly forbyd it: that it can not also be right to desyer it.⁴⁰

As he develops his argument, it becomes clear that Bibliander interprets God’s use of the Turks through the lens of the Old Testament and sets out views as strong as those articulated Luther, if not stronger. God’s purpose in raising up the Turks and sending them against Europe is to bring European Christendom to repentance. For this reason, it would be sinful, he explains, even to desire the removal of the affliction apart from the effecting the repentance which God sought through this appointed means. Without repenting, he adds, European Christians would be like the child who wants his mother’s beating to stop but also wants to continue his bad behaviour, which prompted the beating in the first place.

Bibliander continues his argument but enough has been said to make the point—it is sensible, indeed imperative, that we allow his views articulated in *Ad nominis*, published in 1542, to inform our interpreting of his thinking behind the preparing of *Machumetis Saracenorum*, published in 1543. Here we should reflect on the thoughtful comments of Miller⁴¹ about the “ambivalent, multivalent, even self-

³⁸ Bibliander, *A Godly consultation*, 117v.

³⁹ Bibliander, *A Godly consultation*, 117v.

⁴⁰ Bibliander, *A Godly consultation*, 117v.

⁴¹ As Miller stated, the majority of scholarship “has focused on the most significant section contained in this massive work: the Latin Qur’an.” In contrast, he explains, he will explore “how the work functions as a whole text in the context of Bibliander’s life and theology” (Miller, “Theodor Bibliander’s *Machumetis*, 241).

contradictory nature of Bibliander's encyclopedia as a whole;⁴² that is, the *Machumetis Saracenorum*. One might question how Bibliander could believe the Turks were in fact a scourge of God and yet tone down the marginal notes in the *Collectio*. For, as Miller and Gordon both rightly note, for the most part, "the marginalia serve as markers to guide the interested scholar to the sections in which he might be interested."⁴³ "Bibliander's comments do contain polemic, but it is restrained to a remarkable degree."⁴⁴ "Bibliander's glosses do not fulfill the title page promise" related to exposing the absurdity and contradiction of the Qur'ān.⁴⁵ This is all true of a text printed one year after his *Ad nominis*, in which he declared that the Turk is God's sword sent to slay us. How can this be?

Adding to the confusion is the fact that Bibliander can sound a similar note, about the Turks being a punishment sent by God, in a few pages of his long "Apologia pro editione Alcorani." The same view is also articulated in the preface to *Machumetis Saracenorum* in Martin Luther's *Vorrede zu Theodor Biblianders Koranausgabe* [Preface to Theodor Bibliander's Edition of the Quran, 1543],⁴⁶ which is included in two of the seven editions of *Machumetis Saracenorum*. The significant number of editions is due to the previously-mentioned problems Bibliander and Oporinus ran into in printing the text in Basel.

All this adds further to the uncertainty and, thus, seems to recommend the following solution. Bibliander did not produce *Machumetis Saracenorum* with the dual aims of evangelizing Muslims and protecting Christian truth from heresy. If he had, he would have devised a different content and (likely) design for the work. But as it is, he collected together material which allowed him to publish the text of the Qur'ān itself and commentaries of various kinds on the text and on Islamic beliefs and practices with different aims in mind. I think it most likely that his aim was to produce a scholarly work for consumption by the European Republic of Letters.⁴⁷ An alternative possibility could be that he produced the volume with the aim of demonstrating that Protestant beliefs were in no way aligned with the heresy of Islam, the accusation made by Roman Catholics including Widmanstetter.

⁴² Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis*, 248; Gordon, "Theodor Buchmann," 6: 651.

⁴³ Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis*, 248; Gordon, "Theodor Buchmann," 6: 651.

⁴⁴ Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis*, 248; Gordon, "Theodor Buchmann," 6: 651.

⁴⁵ Miller, "Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis*, 248.

⁴⁶ WA 53:569-572.

⁴⁷ On which see, *inter alia*, Luc Vaillancourt, *La lettre familière au XVI siècle: Rhétorique humaniste de l'épistolaire* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2003); Constance M. Furey, *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Either way, the evidence is sufficiently diffuse to preclude the conclusions of Miller. To be sure, some of the documents published by Bibliander touched on evangelism and the combatting of heresy. That was true of nearly all available Latin commentaries concerning the Qur'ān with which Bibliander would have been familiar. Nor would he have disagreed with those sentiments. Nonetheless, such concerns were, for him with respect to *this* publication (of *Machumetis Saracenorum*), secondary and inconsequential. The self-contradictory nature of the content makes this clear. Rather, it was with some other aims in mind—and I think most likely his specific humanist-driven concerns—that he published an ancient text together with commentaries.